RE-CONTEXTUALIZING TEXT: TRANSLATION AND DISCOURSE

SUNITA AGARWAL

Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT

Each utterance is exuberant. It says less than what it intends and means more than what it explicates explicitly. The act of translation is not merely rendition from one language to the other but its challenge lies in uncovering the beliefs, thought processes, intentions and silences in utterances of the speakers/listeners and writers/readers. These frames are influenced by socio political, geographical, cultural and ideological structures of a society. Mary Louis's term "contact zone" aptly describes the process of translation: a bilingual activity which involves interaction between two cultures. Commenting on the challenges of translation, Lyotard in *Postmodern Fables* (1997), says, " We can extrapolate one's language or even phrase regimes, yet we can never get into how one/ the speaker inhabits the language or the culture, thus one is never at home in another's home"(120). The main difficulty lies in the fact that texts in translation are not accompanied by the context of their genesis. As Bourdieu(1989) says, "they do not bring with them the field of production of which they are a product, and the fact that the recipients who are themselves in a different field of production, reinterpret the context in accordance of the structure of the field of reception, are facts that generate some formidable misunderstanding and that can have good or bad consequences."(221)

KEYWORDS: Not Merely Rendition, Influenced by Socio Political, Geographical, Cultural and Ideological Structures

INTRODUCTION

Multi- dimensional semantic and interpretative nature of a literary work makes it imperative for a translator to go beyond word/ sentence level of language. She/he has to constitute meaning of text on the basis of social and communicative function of language. To be judicious and objective, the translator has to interrogate the material, means and resource of the text at various levels simultaneously. He has to find, how '*meaning*' is constructed in a particular physical and social world. How socio-psychological factors influence communication. How temporal and spatial locations of utterance/communication affect the construction of '*meaning*'. How ideological differences between the source language readers and the target language readers can produce different meanings and interpretations. The purpose of translation also creates different meanings and even targeted readers play a significant role in creating '*meaning*'. In the essay "The Politics of Translation" Gyatri Spivak(1993) sees language as the process of meaning construction which is not bound by the text that one is translating, nor is it bound by anything one knows. She says that the translator has to surrender himself to the 'linguistic rhetrocity of language of the original text- the minimal consequence of ignoring this task will be the loss of' the literality and texuality and sensuality of the writing'. (Politics, 110)

Translation of a literary work is not information oriented but interaction oriented wherein different social, political hierarchical relationships get established through interaction. These power dynamics contribute in the formation of identity too. The paradigms and the manner of representation of these structures differ from society to society. For a translator sometimes it becomes difficult to find equivalent signs and semiotics to produce these diverse structures, relationships and

units in the target language. Therefore, it becomes mandatory for the translator to rely on discourse markers and translate the text as a whole unifying, coherent piece of writing contextualizing and re-contextualizing the text, according to the intended purpose of translation. 'Untranslatability' of certain discourse markers, registers and field have led to hybridization where the translator retains the source term in italics to give cultural nuance of the source language to the reader. The introduction of hybridization has facilitated the target readers in understanding culture specific terms and appreciating in linguistic usage contextually

Discourse is about the use of language and text, or about a piece of spoken or written passage or communication, concentrating on how stretches of language become meaningful and unified for the users (Cooks, 1989). It studies text, context and functions of language. Van Djik(1993)contends," text (written or spoken is like an iceberg of information' and it is only its tip which is really expressed in words and sentences.(29) Context is defined as ' aspects of extra-linguistic reality that are taken to be relevant to the communication.' There is a dialectical interrelationship between text and context, context shapes the text and is on the other hand is shaped by the text and this interaction is called textualisation. Anaphoric and cataphoric discourse and reference markers also prove immensely relevant in placing the source language text in the target language and in holding the text together meaningfully. Grice's Speech Act theory examines the purpose of language in the social context and reveals how discourse reflects and determines power structures. Defining discourse analysis, Steel says, it studies, meaningful combination of language units which serve various purposes and perform various acts in various context."

Translation and discourse analysis converge on the relevance of sociological and ideological context in the production and the reception of a text. Christina Schaffner(2004) states that it is the human communicative activity in the socio cultural setting which is common in both discourse analysis and translation studies, and text and discourse are the product of this activity. Therefore translators create a new act of communication on a previously existing one in a new target language environment by using their own background knowledge (linguistic, social and cultural) and negotiate the meaning between source text producer and target text reader.

A translator might have different goals, motives and aims in translating a particular text and these determine selection of discourse and genre. His motive might differ from the motive of the original source text and it might be aimed at specific readers. By foregrounding, back grounding, juxtaposing, reinforcing; the translator can glorify, subvert, resist, protest, attach or affiliate different meaning to the text than the meaning of the original text. For example, every channel's television news bulletin represents the same set of real events, but difference and the manner of presentation generates different responses. The focus of the item is in accordance to the goals it has, and depends on the set principles. These alteration, transformation and focus shift are usually determined by some agency and dominated by different power structures.

In this paper, the term're-contextualization' has been used in two senses. For me, translating from one language to another language itself is a process of re-contextualizing as each language has its own properties, grammar, syntax and structure, and during the process of a translation, the translator constantly contextualizes and re-contextualizes to produce the intended meaning. Secondly, 're-contextualization' refers to the de- location of a practice from its original context and its re-location with another practice which is governed by certain set of principles and paradigms. Approximation of a text from one medium to other also comes under this category. From a text to a film, a story to a drama, using a historical event or some political change as a source for writing a fiction or any other literary genre are different ways of re-

contextualization. Girish Karnad's play *Tughlaq* is based on medieval history of India, which is replaced by the post independence political scenario of India. The central plot in *Hayavadan* is based on a story from *Kathacharitsagar* (The Ocean of Stories) dating 11 th Century and Thomas Mann's work "Transposed Head" a German Novella written in 1940. Thus *Hayavadan*'s origin are inter generic (Re-contextualized from a novella and story to drama) and inter cultural (India to Germany and back to India). The story is about conflict between head and body; self and other. In *KathaCharitsagar* and Thomas Mann's novella the conflict is presented philosophically while Girish Karnad relocates it in the contemporary socio and political context of post independence India. Similarly Karnad borrows the story of his play *Nagamandal* from folklore and a myth. Adaptation of Shakespeare's plays for a film like "Haider" from *Hamlet*, "Maqbool" from *Macbeth* and "Omkara" from *Othello*, Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* to "Three Idiots" ,Tagore's *Home and the World* to *Ghere Bahere'* are the few the examples to validate this point.

Translating a dramatic work proves more intricate because of its multi semiotic nature and the necessity to preserve theatricality and performativity of the original text. Translation of a theatrical text means working at multiple and multilayered codes; it means to bring out different levels of cultural meaning ; it means to delve deep into characters identities and construct/re-construct these ; it means to underline outer and inner conflict and achieve emotional intensity to motivate and move the dramatic action. According to Susan Bassnett (1991), "a dramatic text involves a series of elements among which 'the linguistic system is only one optional component in a set of interrelated systems that comprise the spectacle' (Bassnett, 120). Drama translators must always be aware of the fact that the eventual accomplishment of dramatic meaning originates in the perfect understanding of a complex set of textual codes and indicators which interrelates with a pragmatic and situational context, as well as with an oral communication: grammatical and semantic pauses, iterative structures, deliberate flouting of lexical norms, and so on.

Habib Tanvir's play, '*Chanrandas Chor'* is a contemporary Indian classic written in Chhattisgarhi language. It is largely an oral text assembled piecemeal to suit specific needs and talents of tribal performer of Chhattisgarh. The play, translated to English by Anjum Katyal, is embedded with village culture, Chhattisgarhi folk songs and dances which make the action of the drama move. But to translate regional culture and orality of the dramatic text, the translator has to depend extensively on the discourse markers of the play. She has to study different contextual and situational speech acts which render meaning to the text and make the dramatic movement possible. She has to explicate, explain and add detailed notes of the setting which have Indian religious and cultural references. Based on Rajasthani folklore by Vijaydan Detha, the play revolves around the folk hero and honest thief Charandas who inadvertently takes four pledges to a Satnami Guru. The four oaths were that he will never have food in a gold plate, never ride on an elephant as a head of the procession, not marry a queen and will never accept the throne of a country as a king. The guru insists him to take a fifth oath by saying "You are a great liar. Give up lying." The Chor consents. Ironically, he comes across all the four things which he abandoned as a pledge. In Vijaydan Detha's story the thief was to be put to death as a punishment for his refusal to be king, while the Guru, accepts the throne. Tanvir modifies the end of the play in contemporary context, by replacing the corrupt act with a chorus act of respect, where the villagers acknowledge the thief's honesty and honor his memory.

Employing her linguistic competence, creativity and knowledge a translator sometimes can take liberty to omit, add or make certain changes in the translated text to avoid monotony and redundancy. In Anjum Katyal's translated version, we have two more encounters of Charandas chor which establish his kind hearted and generous Robin Hood image and these help western readers and audience to relate to the text. Jagariti, a theatre group, has decided to

perform'Charandas Chor''s the Fnglish translation by Anjum Katayal in Bengaluru, India. The play has been recontextualised in an urban setting with urban characters. The English script incorporated the language as it is used in urban India today, especially in Bengaluru, with its smattering of Kannada, Tamil, Hindi and Urdu woven into it.

Even two different translated versions of the same text can render different interpretations. In this context Gopinathan comments, 'In fact translation as an act of interpretation involves a creative approach to the literary text. The concept that each translator interprets in interpretation involves the text is obvious by the fact no two translation of the same text are identical. The culture, socio- semantic, aesthetic and stylistic aspects of a literary piece of work is effectively translated only by interpretive like substitution and compensation." (1993:106). The different linguistic representation of the title of Mahasweta Devi's story '*Stannadayani*', in two different translation version evokes distinct response from readers. Gyatri Chakarvarty Spivak gives literal translation of the title "Breast Giver" wherein 'Body' becomes site of the protagonist's exploitation- an identity and betrayal both and it arouses shock and pity at the abject poverty and exploitation of woman's body. The story is about a woman who supports her family by becoming a professional wet nurse and in the end dies of breast cancer. On the other hand, Ella Dutt's title *'The Wet Nurse'* focuses this work of wet nurse as a source of livelihood, as her profession rather than bringing forth the crude exploitative act. .

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, Language shapes reality and shifting of discourse and context can change the perception of this reality, while, re-contextualization can add multiplicity to it. Translation as a form of linguistic interface introduces discourse shifts, destabilizes received meanings, creates alternative views of reality and establishes new representations.

REFERENCES

1. Bassnett, Susan1 '*Translating for the Theatre: The Case against Performability'*, *TTR* 4 (1):99-111. 1991

2. Bourdieu, Pierre.Social Condition of the International Circulation of Ideas' in Richard Shusterman, Bourdieu: A Critical Reader .Oxford Blackwell, 1999.220Cook, G .*Discourse.* New Delhi: OUP, 1989

3. Gopinathan, G. and Kandaswamy, S. *The Problems of Translation*. Lokabharati Prakashan, 1983.

4. Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *Postmodern Fables*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

5. Devi, Mahasweta. "The Breast-Giver.*" In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. By Gayatri Chakravorty. Spivak. New York: Routledge, 2006. 305-31. Print.

6. Pratt, Mary Louise. Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation.London and New York: Rout ledge, 1992.

7. Schaffner, C. Political Discourse Analysis from the point of view of Translation Studies. *Journal of Language and Politics* 3:1 .John Benjamin's Publishing Company, UK.2004.117-50.

8. Spivak, Chakarvarty Gyatri. "The Politics of Translation" in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. : London and New York: Rout ledge, 1993

9. Tanveer, Habib. *Charandas Chor*, translated by Anjum katyal .Seagull Books, 1996.

10. Van Dijk, A.T.) Discourse as Structure and Process. Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction. Volume I. SAGE Publications, London. (1997a)